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# Remediating history: assessing the past in Dutch historical fiction for children c. 1960–1980

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## Remediating history: assessing the past in Dutch historical fiction for children c. 1960–1980

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### ABSTRACT

Historical fiction is a powerful way of transmitting national history to later generations. It emerged in the nineteenth century as a means of building identity and fostering solidarity. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, former representations of history were deconstructed. Instead of glorifying the nation, social evils were exposed. As a consequence of this, western European histories of children's literature claim a shift in children's books from an emphasis on political to social history. Historical heroes and triumphs were replaced by accounts of the lives of common people and how they were touched by great events. This article investigates the influence of this changed perception and representation of history on images of nationality in Dutch historical children's books. Two groups are identified: a group of books that are critical of historical practices and events, focus on the lives of common people, and project emancipatory ideals on historical characters; and a group of books that transmit a conventional image of the past which was introduced in former periods, in which nation-building and the formulation of a national character reigned. However, images of nationality transgress these categories.

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## Introduction

Historical fiction was discovered in the nineteenth century as a powerful means to represent the past.<sup>1</sup> It did not take long to realise it would also be a powerful means to transmit images of national history to future generations and thereby play a role in the determination of a collective memory. Next to other mnemonic practices, such as commemorations, statues, and historical films or plays, the historical novel is a specific “figure of memory” to evoke the past.<sup>2</sup> It existed as a genre for adults from the beginning of the nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Rigney, “Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance,” in *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts*, ed. Stefan Berger et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 79–96.

<sup>2</sup>Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992).

<sup>3</sup>Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971); Linas Eriksonas, “Towards the Genre of Popular National History: Walter Scott after Waterloo,” in Berger et al., ed. *Narrating the Nation*, 117–32.

emerged as a genre for children in many western European countries half a century later.<sup>4</sup> In several western European countries this happened along with the development of history education becoming compulsory in primary education.<sup>5</sup> History education at that time was primarily meant to build on a national identity and foster patriotism. It is no coincidence that the emergence of historiography, history education, and historical fiction coincides with the emergence of nation states and the search for a way to position oneself as a nation state and to construct the identity of one's inhabitants, who were supposed to become a "mnemonic community".<sup>6</sup> History education and historical fiction in western European countries offered an idealised, romanticised, heroic version of the past, past events, and people from the past.<sup>7</sup> Quite soon historical fiction became one of the most popular genres for children to read as a leisure activity.<sup>8</sup> It was, and still is, read not only to learn something about the past, but also for the exciting adventures set in past periods it presents. Rigney therefore claims that this is one of the forms of cultural remembrance that has more impact than scholarly history, even though the latter has more cultural authority:

In contrast, films, novels or plays enjoy less authority, but are generally more popular and thus arguably more influential. In the swings and roundabouts of cultural practice, what one form of remembrance wins on authority, the other may win on allure.<sup>9</sup>

Although it originated as a supplement to history education, it was often later rejected as such. The reason was its combination of fact and fiction.<sup>10</sup> Historical fiction brings images of the past into circulation as "faction", the narrative form in which facts and fiction are mixed to form an appealing story representing a past period or event. While at least some elements must be based on facts to gain the adjective "historical", such as the setting, a historical event, or certain characters, often the plot and the main character(s) are fictive.

Researching the genre one finds that countries and groups within countries all have their favourite historical periods, characters, and events.<sup>11</sup> They are chosen time and again as valuable to pass on to the next generation, often because they are considered decisive for the development of a national or cultural identity or because they symbolise important values within a particular culture.<sup>12</sup> They are repeatedly told and retold in new versions that are adapted to current cultural, societal, literary, educational, ideological, pedagogical, and representational norms. Erll and Rigney speak in this sense of the dynamics of cultural memory:

<sup>4</sup>Jan van Coillie, *Leesbeesten en boekenfeesten: hoe werken (met) kinder- en jeugdboeken?* [Reading Animals and Book Parties: How to Work with Children's Books?] (Leuven: Davidsfonds/Infodok, 1999), 176–87; Janet Fischer, "Historical Fiction," in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996), 368–78; Sanne Parlevliet, "Bring Up the Children: National and Religious Identity and Identification in Dutch Children's Historical Novels 1848–c. 1870," *History of Education* 43 (2014): 468–86; Heinrich Pleticha, "Das geschichtliche Jugendbuch" [The Historical Children's Book], in *Lexikon der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, vol. 5, *Literarische Begriffe* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1995); Bea Ros, "Het verleden als vehikel voor het heden. Historische jeugdboeken" [The Past as a Vehicle for the Present. Historical Children's Books], in *Een land van waan en wijs. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse jeugdliteratuur* [A Land of Illusion and Wisdom. History of Dutch Children's Literature], ed. Rita Ghesquière et al. (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2014), 280–310.

<sup>5</sup>Arie Wilschut, *Beelden van tijd: de rol van historisch tijdsbewustzijn bij het leren van geschiedenis* [Images of Time: the Role of Historical Consciousness when Learning about History] (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2011).

<sup>6</sup>Arie Wilschut, "Historisch besef als onderwijsdoel" [Historical Consciousness as Educational Goal], *Historisch Huis*, <http://www.historischhuis.nl/HistBesef/HHBesef3.html> (accessed July 7, 2016); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, "Bring Up the Children".

<sup>8</sup>Van Coillie, *Leesbeesten*, 177.

<sup>9</sup>Rigney, "Fiction as Mediator", 80.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 79–80; Anonymous, "Jeugdliteratuur. Je moet maar durven!" [Children's Literature. If You Dare], in *Kleio Didactica* 21 (Den Haag: V.G.N., 1980), 305.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, "Bring Up the Children".

<sup>12</sup>Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994).

When we look at the emergence and “life” of memory sites, it becomes clear that these are based on repeated media representations, on a host of remediated versions of the past which “converge and coalesce” [...] into a *lieu de mémoire*, which create, stabilize and consolidate, but then also critically reflect upon and renew these sites.<sup>13</sup>

This remediation of memory sites is interesting in terms of continuity and change in images of national identity and citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Especially interesting are periods in which the perceived function of history changes, for what happens to the representation of the past when history is no longer seen as an example, as the heroic genesis of a mnemonic community and an inevitable prequel to the present? This happened to be the case in the 1960s and 1970s and will be demonstrated in this article using the Dutch case as an example.<sup>15</sup>

## The past is a bad country

The understanding of the relationship between past and present is subject to change.<sup>16</sup> In most western European countries it evolved from a romantic fascination for the past as something far away, something strange, something to long for in search of a link with the past during periods of the development of nation states. To connect people to each other and to their nations, the past was presented as an inextricable prequel to the present, something that binds the people and their country together. History told people who they were; history, identity, and nation-building formed a strong trinity. This cumulated into the invention of practices that suggested a connection with the past – identified by Hobsbawm as invented traditions<sup>17</sup> – aiming at the creation of a sense of historical continuity. Tollebeek calls these three forms of historical consciousness the romantic, the modern, and the anti-modern historical consciousness, forms that inspired the historical novel for children in its first decades.<sup>18</sup> The past and people of the past were presented as examples. Often historical figures were protagonists, but also fictional children experiencing famous historical events were presented as heroes, invariably courageous and patriotic. Everything is about national power and heroism, initially drenched in historical facts but gradually, as the twentieth century approaches, driven by adventure.<sup>19</sup>

However, in the 1960s and 1970s a radical change in the perceived relationship between past and present occurred. Following the growing criticism of contemporary society and social structures, the past became a foreign country again, just like in the modern consciousness. However, now it was no longer a country to long for, a country of nostalgia,

<sup>13</sup>Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, “Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics,” in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 5.

<sup>14</sup>Frits van Oostrom, *Entoen.nu. De canon van Nederland. Rapport van de commissie ontwikkeling Nederlandse canon. Deel A* [Andthen.now. The Dutch Canon. Report of the Dutch Canon Development Committee, Part A] (Den Haag: Ministerie van OCW, 2006); Rita Ghesquiere, Sofie Ermens, and Liesbeth Vercammen, “Wij en de anderen: zoeken naar je eigen identiteit. De rol van de historische roman in de Vlaamse jeugdliteratuur” [We and the Others: Looking for Your Own Identity. The Role of Historical Fiction in Flemish Children’s Literature], in *De smalle marge van de multiculturele samenleving* [The Narrow Margins of Multicultural Society], ed. Piet Mooren and Karen Ghonem-Woets (Den Haag: Biblion Uitgeverij, 2001), 91–2.

<sup>15</sup>All translations of Dutch sources and children’s books are my own.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Jo Tollebeek, “De conjunctuur van het historisch besef” [Trends in Historical Consciousness], in *Horizonten van weten en kunnen XXI. Lessen voor de eenentwintigste eeuw* [Horizons of Knowledge and Capacity. Lessons for the Twenty First Century], ed. Bart Raymaekers and Gerd van Riel (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven/Davidsfonds, 2002), 167–93.

<sup>17</sup>Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, “Bring Up the Children”; Sanne Parlevliet, “Heimwee naar Holland? Veranderingen in het beeld van Nederland als ‘heim’ in historische jeugdboeken” [Homesick for Holland. Changes in the Image of ‘Home’ in Historical Children’s Books], *Literatuur zonder leeftijd* [Literature Without Age] 96 (2015): 29–48; Parlevliet, “Fiction for Peace? Domestic Identity, National Othering and Peace Education in Dutch Historical Novels for Children, 1914–1935,” *International Research in Children’s Literature* 8 (2015): 17–30.

<sup>19</sup>Fischer, “Historical Fiction,” 369; Ros, “Het verleden,” 284–95.

but a country to condemn, a bad country. The past had not brought the freedom, dignity, and justice the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s called for. It only brought a social establishment and system profiting from inequality and much-criticised power relationships. The past was considered full of wrongdoing. It did not give examples to follow; rather, it only gave examples to avoid. Tollebeek calls this the neo-modern historical consciousness:

a reversal of the modern historical consciousness. It turned its pedagogics inside out, as well as rejecting its desire for continuity with the past. How could the present ever be considered the completion of the past, when that past was full of outrages?<sup>20</sup>

This resulted in seeking examples of a wrong past, “black” pages of national histories, and the description of history as an illness in the case of, for example, the development of capitalism, clericalism, colonialism, imperialism, the Second World War, and Dutch action in Surinam and Indonesia.<sup>21</sup>

When Lea Dasberg published her important book about historical children’s fiction in 1981, the social movement asking for social reform was just past its peak. She states the tendency of children’s literature to openly proclaim a progressive social view, or at least the tendency to award those books that do so. Children’s literature was considered a device to make future citizens conscious of society’s problems, but especially to raise questions about authority, freedom, class, gender, minorities, and traditional role patterns.<sup>22</sup> Social criticism was extended from the present to the past; consequently, the representation of history in former historical children’s books was criticised and a new approach took shape.

According to other western European histories of children’s literature, historical fiction for children changed in the 1960s and 1970s as a consequence of this new historical consciousness. They emphasise how the focus shifted from heroic deeds of political and military figures to common people and the consequences of historical circumstances and events to their lives. “In the early years of the genre real figures appeared frequently,” Janet Fischer states in the *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature*, “but increasingly as the emphasis has moved from a political to social history, lives of ordinary, imaginary people have been told.”<sup>23</sup> The German *Lexikon der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* confirms her findings: “Während früher häufiger historische Persönlichkeiten im Mittelpunkt der Erzählungen standen, werden heute vorwiegend die kulturhistorischen und sozialen Verhältnisse betont.”<sup>24</sup> Dutch histories of children’s literature and historical fiction also emphasise the shift in attention from great figures and events to the way they touched the lives of ordinary people.<sup>25</sup> However, together with Flemish writers on the history of children’s literature, they also distinguish more explicit forms of criticism of the past. History gets appointed the role of prosecutor, Ros states. She identifies much attention for “the black or unwritten pages of history” and a projection of contemporary emancipation and engagement:

<sup>20</sup>Tollebeek, “De conjunctuur,” 178.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 177–81.

<sup>22</sup>Lea Dasberg, *Het kinderboek als opvoeder* [The Children’s Book as Educator] (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 3–17. See also Peter van den Hoven, *Grensverkeer. Over jeugdliteratuur* [Border Traffic. About Children’s Literature] (Den Haag: NBLC Uitgeverij, 1994), 25–6; Anne de Vries, *Wat heten goede kinderboeken?* [What are Good Children’s Books?] (Amsterdam: Querido, 1989), 266–76.

<sup>23</sup>Fischer, “Historical Fiction,” 368.

<sup>24</sup>Pleticha, “Das geschichtliche,” 11.

Not infrequently postwar writers project their own emancipatory ideals on the past. In the twentieth century novels of ideas protagonists got ascribed characteristics that fit better to desires and values of the time of representation than the represented time.<sup>26</sup>

Deconstruction is the key, write Ghesquiere and others; the mythical representation of the past is unmasked and replaced by cold reality.<sup>27</sup> Jan van Coillie observes the same and also notices a shift in the preference for certain periods. The preference for exemplary and adventurous representations of the past brought early writers of historical fiction for children to the Middle Ages, “times of knights, castles and crusades, witches, plague and superstition”, to the sixteenth and seventeenth century with its religious wars and discovery voyages and, for the Netherlands, to the eighteenth century because of the adventurous expeditions of the East India Company. In the years of social criticism authors more often chose the nineteenth century as “the century of inhuman circumstances, child labour, slavery, the labour movement and revolution”.<sup>28</sup>

The message of writers of these engaged historical novels for children is that there were no “good old days”, that history’s course is not teleological, not evolutionary positive per se, but rather a chain of ideas, ideals, and events that are not worthy of imitation. Historical fiction is a derivative mnemonic practice that originates from the intention to foster feelings of solidarity and patriotism, intended to build on a national identity and aimed at the education of future citizens. This neo-modern historical consciousness that articulates not the continuation but rather an alienation of the past makes a renegotiation of the representation of nationality in this practice necessary. How does this change in the perceived function of history influence the representation of national history and nationality in historical fiction for children?

Dutch historical novels for children written in the 1960s and 1970s will serve as a case study in this article. In order to make a representative selection, a database of historical books for children published between 1960 and 1970 was compiled, consisting of books written by Dutch writers which relate a story based on a specific period or event in Dutch history. This database consists of almost 375 books, both “faction” and non-fiction, written by many different authors. From this database many books only existed temporarily in the field of children’s literature: they were not reprinted, did not win a prize, and were not mentioned on lists of recommended children’s books. To determine which books were most present, most popular, and most easily available for children, and consequently most influential, reprints and prizes were retrieved. Moreover, from the 176 authors in the database, eight authors seemed to dedicate themselves especially to historical children’s books and wrote more than six books in the genre in this period, some of them even more than 15. Those authors in particular left their stamp on the representation and interpretation of Dutch history in books for children in this period. It was therefore decided to include at least one book by each of these writers in the selection. However, many books by prolific writers turned out to have no more than one edition, while the books by prize-winning authors were reprinted many times. By including books by prolific writers that were rather

<sup>25</sup>Harry Bekkering, “Onvoltooid verleden tijd. Het historische jeugdboek” [Incomplete Times. The Historical Children’s Book], in *De hele Bibelebontse berg. De geschiedenis van het kinderboek in Nederland & Vlaanderen van de middeleeuwen tot heden* [The Whole Bibelebont Mountain. History of the Children’s Book in the Netherlands and Flanders from the Middle Ages to the Present], ed. Nette Heimeriks and Willem van Toorn (Amsterdam: Querido, 1989), 295–317.

<sup>26</sup>Ros, “Het verleden,” 295.

<sup>27</sup>Ghesquiere et al., “Wij en de anderen,” 95.

<sup>28</sup>Van Coillie, *Leesbeesten*, 183.



temporarily present, as well as books that won prizes, were reprinted many times and stayed alive, often even beyond the research period, the selection tried to be most representative for the production of historical children's books in the 1960s and 1970s. Based on this, 13 books were eventually selected: five award-winning books that were reprinted many times and eight books by prolific writers that got no prizes and were published in fewer editions.<sup>29</sup>

Strikingly, most of the prize-winning authors were female while all other writers were male. Also, the prize-winning authors were all professionally engaged in children's literature, while the other writers were teachers, civil servants, journalists, and one of them was even a sailor. The teachers were mostly practising Protestants, thereby continuing the tradition of Protestant teachers writing historical fiction for children as a supplement to history education since the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The prize-winning novels were written by writers who, by their background, had a more progressive view on history and the representation of history.

*Marijn bij de lorredraaiers* (1965, translated into English as *Slave Doctor* in 1970) was written by Miep Diekmann, who grew up in the Dutch colony of Curacao. Consequently, she had been an eyewitness to Dutch colonial history. Her book won the National Prize for Children's Literature. *Kruistocht in spijkerbroek* (1973, translated into English as *Crusade in Jeans*) was written by a professional historian, Thea Beckman, and won the Dutch annual children's literature prize the Golden Slate-Pencil. *De mare van de witte toren* [The story of the white tower] won the same prize and was written by Alet Schouten in 1970, who grew up in the Dutch colony of Indonesia. *Stad in de storm* [City in the storm] by Thea Beckman won the Silver Slate-Pencil. The only male prize-winning author from this selection, Henk van Kerkwijk, was a progressive social critic who won the Golden Slate-Pencil for his *Komplot op volle zee* [Conspiracy on the open sea] in 1969 as well as the children's book of the year award. Books by prolific but not professional writers went into two editions at most, while some of the prize-winning books were reprinted many times: *Kruistocht in spijkerbroek* nearly 100 times and *Stad in de storm* around 25 times. *Marijn bij de lorredraaiers* was reprinted at least 10 times.

In these books, three strategies could be identified as a reaction to the new approach of history and the relationship between past and present. The first consisted of attributing protagonists with modern ideas, with which readers could identify, and contrasting these ideas explicitly to ideas and practices of the past period described. However, the modern and anti-modern historical consciousness were far from absent from children's literature. Secondly, characteristics that had become typical representations of Dutchness were criticised in the historical novels for children of the 1960s and 1970s, but some stuck to traditional stereotypes. The third element that is deconstructed in the books concerns the representation of history itself. Again, we will see that not all books selected for study chose this critical stance. The analyses thus show that, in contrast to what histories of children's literature claim, next to what could be called neo-modern historical novels for children, there still existed a large number of conventional historical novels for children that adhered more to the modern and anti-modern approach.

<sup>29</sup>Books about the Second World War were excluded because these were not considered historical novels in the strict sense that authors had not experienced the event or period themselves.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, "Bring Up the Children".



## Protagonists ahead of their time, or not?

In the neo-modern historical consciousness history no longer counted as a repository of positive examples; on the contrary, it aroused indignation. History was the story of a wrong past, of what should be avoided in the future. History writing became an expression of condemnation, and history a story of progress.<sup>31</sup> In historical children's fiction this is expressed in fictional protagonists criticising the time in which they live, the represented time often accompanied by prophesising social changes that were realised in the time of representation. Miep Diekmann's *Marijn bij de lorredraaiers* is the most explicit example of this indictment of the past. In the Preface the author is very clear about her intentions: the book is meant to show the wrongs of the slave trade and slavery and by doing so she hopes to diminish current racial discrimination that she considers a consequence of this guilty past.<sup>32</sup> The book tells the story of a young, white brother and sister living in Curacao in the seventeenth century. They belong to a family of rich, white colonisers who own black people as slaves. In the book the young siblings, Marijn and Oeba, represent present-day ideas on slavery. Against all other people their family strives for better treatment of the slaves and hopes to give them equal rights in the future. They emphasise the slaves are "people, who experience pain and grieve, although most of our compatriots only see them as trade".<sup>33</sup>

The strategy of creating protagonists living in another time but representing modern ideas has two effects. The first is that it is not difficult for readers to identify with them, for they do not differ much from the readers in ideas. The second effect, which is clearly dependent on the realisation of the first, is the readers' relative absolution of a guilty past. Yes, the Dutch were cruel to slaves and that should be condemned. But there were good Dutchmen as well, who paved the way for the abolishment of the slave trade and slavery, and we are urged to identify with them. Characters such as Marijn, Oeba, and their family soften a national guilt and instil the illusion of equality as a trans-historical Dutch value.<sup>34</sup>

In two other examples writers employ the same strategy of using protagonists as mediators between historical practices and modern ideas. In *Spion of pionier* [Spy or pioneer] by Klaas Norel (1970), protagonist Pieter travels to many different countries in the sixteenth century and is most impressed by China, in which meritocratic ideas had already been implemented. Seeing all kinds of misery during his travels, he sighs many times that intelligence and diligence rather than descent should determine one's social position and condemns the Dutch class-ridden society at that time: "As if every grand- or great grandson inherits the qualities of his forefather! Often they were just spoiled and weak children."<sup>35</sup> Thus, Holland in the sixteenth century is not presented as an example; on the contrary, the time of representation is implicitly pointed at as an improved version of the past.

In *De stormvogel van Edam* [The fulmar of Edam] by Dick Dreux (1968), the criticism directly concerns the social position of the protagonist. Nars is an orphan who is made to work on a shipyard, where he is bullied by middle-class boys: "they kicked my rope in the

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan, *Reading History in Children's Books* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 163–85.

<sup>32</sup>Miep Diekmann, *Marijn bij de Lorredraaiers* [Slave doctor] (1965; Amsterdam: Leopold, 1994), 7.

<sup>33</sup>Diekmann, *Marijn*, 72.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Sanne Parlevliet, "Is That Us? Dealing with the 'Black' Pages of History in Historical Fiction for Children (1996–2010)," *Children's Literature in Education*, doi:10.1007/s10583-015-9270-2.

<sup>35</sup>Klaas Norel, *Spion of pionier* [Spy or pioneer] (Amsterdam/Brussel: Deltos Elsevier, 1970), 126.

water and said: ‘Well, scum, go get it back!’”<sup>36</sup> The world of the children mirrors the adult world in the book; burghers and regents consider themselves better than the lower classes: “They were very posh, with fat bellies and a lot of money and ships. And when they hired the father of the orphanage, they told him to keep his big mouth shut to the honorable burghers.”<sup>37</sup> Nars refuses to reconcile himself with his situation. He wants to go to school and become educated. However, although he does find a good job and acquires a respected position, he never manages to reach an equal footing with his peers in the upper classes. As young children, they manage to cross the borders of class and play together. But when they get older, the differences become too big. “Scum,” Nars’ friend calls him in a fight. And when he wants to say sorry, “Nars did not want to listen anymore. [...] He did not believe anymore that burgher children could be his friends.”<sup>38</sup> The end of their friendship confirms the condemnation of the social order in these times and presents a pessimistic view: one could climb the social ladder by working hard, but one could never lose the stigma of descent.

Like Diekmann, Dreux also created mediators between the norms and values of the represented time and the ideas that ruled in the time of representation. In this case it is not the protagonist with whom readers identify, but two father figures: the father of the orphanage and first mate of a ship who has shipbuilder ambitions. Both disagree with contemporary ideas of inequality along class lines. Therefore, the father of the orphanage helps Nars to find a job and a good future. And first mate Tadema employs him, together with a bunch of prisoners, incarcerated for begging, to give them a chance of a better life, because “not everyone who can’t find a job is a criminal” and “one should help people in need.”<sup>39</sup> Again, the practices of the past are condemned, but the reader is invited to identify with characters who share present-day ideas. Once more, the protagonists could be said to be ahead of their time. It is here that we find both another example of condemning the past because of its social injustice, and images of the child being able to look beyond class differences without being able to be an agent in changing it, and the adult, who, if prepared, is able to go against it, respectively. The fact that most adults did not do this makes the condemnation even more severe.

Criticism of social circumstances in history works by contrast. In the time of representation, slavery and the slave trade were condemned, meritocracy praised, and a social system that took care of the weak and the poor commonly accepted as a good system. Butler and O’Donovan note that the next step to projecting the course of such particular events to history as a whole is then lurking:

It is here that we might be tempted to look beyond the proximate causes of individual events, towards some larger-scale pattern within history as a whole – for having drawn a line between that particular Then and our Now we are free to extend it beyond those two points, further into the past or the future and to conclude that history in general describes a process of decline or of ascent.<sup>40</sup>

Showing the cruel and difficult circumstances in which slaves, low-borns, and orphans had to live in the represented time contrasts to the time in which the books were published, the

<sup>36</sup>Dick Dreux, *De stormvogel van Edam* [The fulmar of Edam] (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1968), 8.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>40</sup>Butler and O’Donovan, *Reading History*, 167.

time of representation, in such a way that history implicitly became a story of progress. This representation in turn contrasts to representations offered in historical fiction before, when the genre was inspired by the so-called “modern historical consciousness”.<sup>41</sup>

Although histories of children’s literature mark the 1960s and 1970s as a turning point in the orientation of historical fiction, criticising instead of glorifying the past, one also finds a more than coincidental historical novel for children that holds on to the enlightened humanistic worldview that was presented in many of the earlier books of the genre. They confirm what Joosen and Vloeberghs argue:

Stories set in the present day and written in the realistic mimetic tradition often present the collapse of this [the enlightened humanistic] trend and the ideology that comes with it. The conventional values of social integration and continuity from generation to generation can hardly be considered valid anymore. Unless ... the author chooses a historical setting?<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to the neo-modern historical consciousness that brought forth books such as those written by Diekmann, Dreux, and Norel, the other six historical novels written by prolific writers of historical fiction can be characterised by similar attempts to create a feeling of being connected to the past as the books published not long after the birth of the genre.<sup>43</sup> Again, the past gets ascribed exemplary and didactical values. In line with this, they present role models, lessons to be learned from the past, settings of triumph to long for, and events in which common people could show love for their country. Traditional ways of life and conservative thinking are presented as exemplary. Historical distance seems to be chosen to give authority to patriotic norms and values.

Thus, even the period claimed as most critical when it comes to taking for granted certain gender norms, class differences, ideas about other cultures, authoritarian pedagogics, and traditional family structures brought forth historical novels for children that failed wholly to question those norms. Novels praising patriotism, downgrading cultural others, and heroising the Dutch were still published. One could easily mistake them for much earlier publications. I will discuss three of them.

*De tirannie verdrijven* [Drive away the tyranny], written by Piet Prins (1960), belongs to the type of the “refused encounter”. The refused encounter is described by Thaler as one of three types of historical novels for children classified according to the relationship between the fictional protagonist and factual historical figures: the impossible encounter; the refused encounter; and the encounter. Protagonists in novels of the first type, the impossible encounter, do not meet a historical figure, while protagonists in novels of the last type do. In the case of a refused encounter, a fictional protagonist and a factual historical figure share the setting of the story, but they do not actually meet.<sup>44</sup>

Maarten, the protagonist, belongs to a Dutch protestant family that has fled to Germany in the 1560s when Holland was occupied by the Spanish. They wait for the liberation of Holland and put all their trust in Count Lodewijk van Nassau. After Maarten unmasks a spy of Alva, the Spanish Governor, the boy is allowed to join Lodewijk’s campaign to liberate Holland. So, Maarten is in the army of the historical count and the readers often read about

<sup>41</sup>Tollebeek, “De conjunctuur,” 171.

<sup>42</sup>Vanessa Joosen and Katrien Vloeberghs, *Uitgelezen jeugdliteratuur. Ontmoetingen tussen traditie en vernieuwing* [Well-read Children’s Literature. Encounters between Tradition and Renewal] (Leuven/Leidschendam: Lannoo Campus/Biblio, 2008), 154.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, “Bring Up the Children”.

<sup>44</sup>Danielle Thaler, “Fiction Versus History: History’s Ghosts,” in *The Presence of the Past in Children’s Literature*, ed. Ann Lawson Lucas (London: Praeger, 2003), 3–11.

the actions, behaviour, even the words and feelings of the count, but the boy does not meet him. Their worlds only graze against each other, which gives the author the chance to create both a fictional world of Maarten's trials, triumphs, and tribulations, and at the same time recount an important part of Dutch history.

Whereas Lodewijk fulfils the role of the historical hero, Maarten is his fictional counterpart. He not only unmasks a spy, he also contributes to the resistance, fighting for freedom for his country. The real hero in the story, however, is the Protestant faith. Protestant faith is claimed to be the saviour of the country and the strengthener of the people. For example, when Maarten is captured, he prays fervently and suddenly his hands get loose.<sup>45</sup> He teaches an old hunter who lives in the forest without any faith about God and the man is suddenly happier than before. When he dies on the battlefield it is suggested that he is at peace now, because he found God.<sup>46</sup> Count Lodewijk is also a devout Protestant who claims to know he is completely dependent on God, prays often, and finds comfort in the word of God: "Whenever despondency threatened, he sought comfort in God's Word and in prayer. That gave him the strength to persevere."<sup>47</sup> When Lodewijk claims he trusts in God to drive away tyranny, he is praised as a true Christian: "These were not words of someone trusting in his own strength; this was the language of faith of a Christian whose strength was in God!"<sup>48</sup> Prins uses ingredients introduced by nineteenth-century writers of historical fiction for children: glorifying the battle for national freedom and praising orthodox Protestantism by presenting a young fictional character who adheres fervently to both values, giving this ideology historical authority by placing him near a famous historical figure.<sup>49</sup>

*Kees de scheepsjongen* [Kees, the cabin boy] by P. de Rooy (1965) is a classic adventure story with a young protagonist as hero. It is set in the seventeenth century, but the characters and plot are fictional. Kees is a cabin boy on a ship of the East India Company. He is clever and knows about navigation. During his travels he unmasks some criminals and obtains a good position. Two-thirds into the book, some historical information is passed on to the readers, but that is totally subordinate to the adventure. The novel counters the neo-modern historical consciousness in its presentation of life at sea as a fun adventure, denying the harshness, exploitation and misery for the common sailors. Violence is glorified, there is a lot of bloodshed and death, and sailing for the East India Company is presented as exciting and glorious. There is no critical consideration of either the past or the present; the former is only used as the setting for an adventure. Implicitly, though, it transmits the conservative values of the traditional historical children's novel, presenting courage, dedication, and loyalty to the country and its authorities as the highest goal and a means to acquire a good position.

*De scheepsjongen van de Eenhoorn* [The cabin boy of the *Unicorn*] (1962) by R. Feenstra is the most striking example of a novel countering a critical consideration of historical values and practices. The author claims in a preface how, according to him, human character is trans-historical:

<sup>45</sup>Piet Prins, *De tirannie verdrijven* [Drive away the tyranny] (Rotterdam: Groenendijk, 1960), 139.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, "Bring Up the Children".

I myself am of the opinion that mankind has changed very little over the course of the centuries, even if the circumstances have changed. The man in the Bible is the man of today, with all his virtues and vices. The same holds for us and our ancestors.<sup>50</sup>

What follows is a fictional story set in the fifteenth century about a sailor who has to bring a box of money from the Dutch city of Kampen to the German city of Lübeck. Of course he meets with some opposition, embodied in one of his sailors who tries to steal the money. While all the other sailors are Dutch and faithful to the sailor and his mission, this man is black. He is described as “a rough guy and a hooligan”<sup>51</sup> and it is clear from the beginning that he is up to no good. He has no sailing skills, he is rebellious, and complains about the food. He is ascribed stereotypical racist characteristics, with gleaming eyes and an ominous smirk, while the Dutch sailors are faithful and trustworthy, dutiful and just. Feenstra implicitly connects this to the Dutch identity, contrasting it to the black man’s character and intentions. Couched as an adventure story, it turns out to transmit a racist ideology which is all the more striking considering the author’s statement that he considered people in all times and all places to be the same.

### Decrying the Dutch, or not?

The seventeenth century is called the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic, for in this century Dutch trade thrived, especially due to a position of monopoly at sea. The Dutch East India Company, established in 1602, made the Netherlands rich from trade with Asia. Dutch writers of historical novels have long showed a preference for setting their stories in this century to present the greatness of the country. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, authors of Dutch historical novels for children started to strike a different note. Dutch traders were no longer glorified, they were criticised. The shift in focus from the famous and great to the common man is particularly pregnant, for the big differences between the rich who profited from the trade and the common and poor man who did not were clearly emphasised. “The much-praised prosperity of the Republic is only for the upper class,” a boat-hand in the novel *Stad in de storm* [City in the storm] by Thea Beckman (1978) tells the protagonist, who belongs to the richer part of the population:

For regents and their appendages, for the civil servants, the royal household, the officers, patrician traders and perhaps for some craftsmen such as your father. But what do you think of the common man who has to work all the riches together? When I had to break the ice open for the track boat, I sometimes thought my hands would fall off. I have seen three horses starve to death. I saw stiffened beggars along the towpath, frozen to death. I saw a woman fall through the ice with her child because she did not have enough money to cross the toll bridge [...] Of course the Republic is the richest country of the world, but who gains from it?<sup>52</sup>

The mercantile spirit of the Dutch that enriched the country had been reason to praise the Dutch in many historical novels for children before the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>53</sup> Pieter in *Spion of pionier* represents this stereotype. From the moment he signs up as a sailor, he turns out to have a natural “Dutch” eye for trade and soon becomes the most important trader on the ship. He was “not indifferent” to “making a profit”<sup>54</sup>; here, the author understates his

<sup>50</sup>Ruurd Feenstra, *De scheepsjongen van de Eenhoorn* [The cabin boy of the *Unicorn*] (Zutphen: Thieme, 1962), 3.

<sup>51</sup>Feenstra, *De scheepsjongen*, 8.

<sup>52</sup>Thea Beckman, *Stad in de storm* [City in the storm] (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 1978), 12–13.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Parlevliet, “Bring Up the Children”; Parlevliet, “Fiction for Peace?”.

<sup>54</sup>Norel, *Spion*, 103.

trading spirit to emphasise the opposite, for Pieter is not only eager to serve the regents of Holland in where to find the best products, but he also sets up a trade for himself.

However, in the more critical novels this spirit of commerce is cast in a different light. Governors and merchants are criticised for their lust for money at the expense of people and moral values. In *De stormvogel van Edam* the rich masters and the East India Company do not care for the modernisation of ships, because they are afraid for their own “money-bags”.<sup>55</sup> In *Stad in de storm*, regents do not care for the weak and poor they cannot use or put to work for their whole lives to feather the nests of the regents. One of the shipmasters in *Komplot op volle zee* [Conspiracy on the open sea] by Henk van Kerkwijk (1968) says: “I think the lords [...] only care for their own profit. They put most of the money they got from Holland to buy the freedom of the enslaved seamen in their own pocket.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in *Marijn bij de lorredraaiers*, the high gentlemen of the West India Company do not care about the lives of the black people whom they have made slaves, they only care about their own profit:

What did the Dutch governors care? They'd better not know that one of the slave ships went down in the hurricane. They would only regret the “rich take” was lost. Their hardened hearts would not be touched when they heard about the death of the caged and chained men, women and children – the load of Black Ebony from Africa – that must have drowned, defenseless and helpless.<sup>57</sup>

Having criticised this, more than half of the books that were analysed still adhere to traditional stereotypes of Dutch characteristics. For example, Norel represents them explicitly as living modestly and simply. The Dutch are reliable, abhorrent of luxury, and hierarchy is not very important.<sup>58</sup> The love for freedom, always related to what is considered the most decisive period in Dutch history, the Dutch war of independence (1568–1648), is bigger than the country itself: although we are “a tiny people of butter and cheese”, “iron Alva did not intimidate us Dutchmen”.<sup>59</sup> Strikingly, the author who expressed the most criticism of history, history writing, and the social values of the past presents the most traditional image of the Dutch. In Beckman's book, “Dutch common sense” is often mentioned,<sup>60</sup> just as “Dutch thrift”. The Dutch are Calvinistic, dutiful, and responsible. They work, save, and suffer, and everything is aimed at peace in the hereafter.<sup>61</sup> This is all the more striking when reading the explicit condemnation of the representation of history in her books. Although she uses very stereotypical characteristics to describe the Dutch, characteristics that became stereotypical precisely through representations of the Dutch in historical writing and text books, she condemns those representations of history in other books.

## Representing the past

Thea Beckman offers explicit criticism of the representation of Dutch history in history education and history writing in general. Her narrators simply state that writers of history did a bad job. Her books are social critiques of history and the present.

<sup>55</sup>Dreux, *De stormvogel*, 179.

<sup>56</sup>Henk van Kerkwijk, *Komplot op volle zee* [Conspiracy on the open sea] (Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 1968), 140.

<sup>57</sup>Diekmann, *Marijn*, 32.

<sup>58</sup>Norel, *Spion*, 25–6.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 28–9.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Beckman, *Stad*, 103, 286.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.



*Kruistocht in spijkerbroek* is a time-slip novel in which the 16-year-old Dolf is transported to thirteenth-century Europe in which he experiences a children's crusade. Dolf is well educated in history, but during the crusade he realises he only learned about past kings and queens, lords, masters, heroes, and beautiful buildings. He never read about common people. "I got to know the people," he says at the end of the story, "not the lords and masters one reads about in books. And from those people: some cruel and stupid, some so very good ... I learned so much." It leads to a social criticism of the twentieth century:

In the twentieth century people built a whole system of social laws, taking care that the sick, the poor and disabled people would not die from hunger, as it is nowadays. But what did we do with [...] solidarity? [...] We forgot it, and replaced it with forms in quintuple.<sup>62</sup>

In *Stad in de storm* (1979) the criticism is often hidden in ironic references to history writing. For example, when emphasising the huge difference between rich and poor in the Republic, Beckman writes: "The much-praised prosperity of the Republic of the Seven Provinces only existed for the upper classes."<sup>63</sup> The word "much-praised" clearly refers to history accounts of the Golden Age emphasising the richness of the country, without mentioning that the lower classes did not benefit from this at all.

The traditional representation of the courageous Dutch soldier is also criticised. "Is that courage? [...] feeling nothing, knowing nothing, the dull indifference for everything? Shooting like an automaton, like a showman who wants to hit something, anything? Savagely slashing without thinking."<sup>64</sup> The character who says this expresses how it is all common boys in the army, who never had any training and often die totally ignorant and innocent. Do they fight for an ideal? No, they fight because they do not have other jobs. Beckman does not beat about the bush in claiming such heroic representations of the Dutch to be nonsense.

Instead, Beckman gives a voice to common people about one of the most praised means of defence of the Dutch: flooding the land by breaching the banks. Farmers are furious about that; it is their land that is flooded, their income. The other side of the defence measure so often presented as heroic is shown. Besides the fact that there were indeed also Dutch victims, the farmer deconstructs another myth: that a love of freedom and independence is a typical Dutch value. When he is asked if he would have liked the alternative, which is becoming a French subject, he shouts: "Why not? French masters, State masters, we are bled dry anyway. [...] The water is my enemy, not some other Frenchman. Against the water I will fight, for as long as I live."<sup>65</sup> Beckman not only states that the representation of every Dutchman having an eye for a bigger case than its own back yard is false, she also criticises the leaders of the country for not having an eye for the tragic consequences of those deeds by the common people presented as brave.

So, history education offers false images of the past, Beckman's narrator relates explicitly. A romantic representation of war, of fighting for the nation, goes with it, indoctrinating children with wrong ideas and a distorted image of reality. Hans, the main character of *Stad in de storm*, says:

Once I considered war an exciting adventure. [...] The romance of war had us firmly in its grasp. [...] We saw visions of flying flags, stamping boots, pawing horses, shining buttons, a musket in our hands, a feather on our hats, a bandolier across our breasts. Glory, triumph,

<sup>62</sup>Thea Beckman, *Kruistocht in spijkerbroek* [Crusade in jeans] (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 1973), 302.

<sup>63</sup>Beckman, *Stad*, 12.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.



heroism! Put your life in danger for the survival of a free Republic ... All heroism, like school books taught us.

Reality proved different.<sup>66</sup>

The heroism of Dutch historical heroes is also sharply deconstructed. An example is the great Dutch naval hero Michiel Adriaanszoon de Ruyter, who is still mentioned in text books as the best admiral Holland ever had: “it is nonsense to pretend he won the sea battle all by himself,” one of the characters states. The thousands of sailors who helped him were either not Dutch or criminals forced by the Republic to go to sea because it wanted to see the back of them. “They saved the freedom of Holland.”<sup>67</sup> Those brave sea soldiers who are anxious to fight and give their lives for their country that populate text books and former historical novels for children are claimed as fiction. Thereby, Beckman deconstructs the idea that our ancestors are proof of a national character typified by patriotism and self-sacrifice. Real heroism is not to be found in lords and masters, but in the common people, common citizens, hirelings, farm boys, illiterates, poor people, and orphans. They do the hard work, while their leaders take the credit, often not for idealistic reasons, but because they are forced to do so.<sup>68</sup> Beckman’s stories do not refrain from claiming a typical Dutch national character, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, including character traits such as patriotism and self-sacrifice. The difference is that she projects them on to common people.

Diekmann (1965) is more subtle in her condemnation of history writing. She introduces schoolmaster Claesz who, alongside his teaching, writes the history of the Dutch on Curacao. He reports on the trials and tribulations of the Dutch immigrants, but he keeps silent about the vicissitudes of the slaves. Diekmann seems not to blame the writers of history so much as the readers of Claesz’ report and potential buyers of his books: “He could have written that down in his book,” Diekmann states, “but Dutch administrators of the Company would not have cared.” Slaves were considered nothing more than loot.<sup>69</sup> When Oeba proposes writing a book about the wrongs done to slaves, Marijn, as the mouthpiece of the author, voices a similar objection: “Most people in the world cannot read [...]. And those who can read, and have the money to buy a book, also have money to buy slaves.”<sup>70</sup> The wrongs are their source of income.

The social history of the common people and the consequences of historical events on their lives is also emphasised by Te Merwe (1974). He does not explicitly state that former history writing was biased, but by paying attention to the common people he implicitly criticises former representations of the event. In this case it is the siege of the Dutch city of Leiden, which is often described in historical fiction for children.<sup>71</sup> Formerly represented as a heroic story in which brave soldiers fight for their country and firm citizens forsake food for freedom, Te Merwe presents an army full of unsavoury hirelings, sloppy, undisciplined, boozy, gambling, fighting, and cheating for money without any interest in the Dutch situation. It is the protagonist Harmen who represents the inhabitants of Holland. He does fight for the ideal of freedom and for the Prince of Orange. He is an explicit Orangist, anti-Catholic, and unquestionably brave and loyal to his country. So, although implicitly

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 202–3.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>69</sup>Diekmann, *Marijn*, 32.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>71</sup>Lotte Jensen, *De les van Leeuwte. Kinderboeken over het beleg en ontzet van Leiden* [The Lesson from Little Lion. Children’s Books About the Siege and Relief of Leiden] (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2013).

criticising former representations in which the whole Dutch army displayed loyalty to the country and its royal house by presenting irregular forces and a desperate people capable of giving up everything to the enemy for a piece of bread, readers are allowed to identify with a character that represents everything nineteenth-century historical fiction for children on the subject stands for: love for the home country; national freedom as the highest ideal; and obedience and submission. The willingness to offer one's own life for this ideal of freedom is even more pressingly represented in the authority figure of the mayor of the city who, obviously referring to Christ, offers himself to his people to eat, because he does not want to give up the freedom and independence of his country: "Here is my sword, kill me and divide my flesh. Take my body to satisfy thy hunger, but do not expect me to surrender as long as I live."<sup>72</sup> Te Merwe may pay more attention to the common people, but he sticks to a well-tested ideological representation of Dutchness, in which freedom, freedom of thought, and Protestantism rule.

### History's history: a conclusion

Literature for children cannot be separated from the country and culture in which it is produced, as Emer O'Sullivan and Andrea Immel convincingly show in their recent volume on the representation of cultural sameness and difference.<sup>73</sup> It plays an important role in the socialisation and enculturation of the youngest members of society, showing them the dominant ideologies, norms, and values that constitute appropriate frames of thinking, behaviours, and social attendance.<sup>74</sup> Historical literature for children does even more. It mediates dominant images of contemporary culture in the form of given ideologies, often projected on past people and events, but also images of the country, its inhabitants, and important events, in the past and how this past is connected to (the world of) its contemporary readers.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, it aims to not only give readers a sense of who "we" are, but also who "we" were and how we became who "we" are, thereby giving words and images to hazy notions of identity and identification along the lines of historical continuity and change. Accordingly, this mnemonic practice has political dimensions. Particularly in periods of changing social ideas and stirring social movements, children's literature is deployed to mould future citizens. In the 1960s and 1970s, children's literature, specifically children's literature representing the Dutch past, is said to have such a political dimension.

According to histories of children's literature, historical fiction for children undergoes a major change in the 1960s and the 1970s. In her pioneering work on historical children's fiction, Dasberg claims that instead of glorifying the past and promoting past people, practices, and events as examples for present behaviours, ideals, norms, values, and social commitment, historical periods were used to criticise current circumstances, ideologies, and practices. More recent histories of children's literature confirm this finding, showing a match with historiography claiming the function of history, historical consciousness,

<sup>72</sup>H. te Merwe, *Leiden belegerd en behouden* [Leiden Besieged and Saved] (Utrecht: De Banier, 1974), 153.

<sup>73</sup>Emer O'Sullivan and Andrea Immel, "Sameness and Difference in Children's Literature: An Introduction," in *Sameness and Difference in Children's Literature: From the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, ed. Emer O'Sullivan and Andrea Immel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1–25.

<sup>74</sup>John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Stories and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998); Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (London: Garland, 1999).

<sup>75</sup>Butler and O'Donovan, *Reading History*.

and the relation between past and present radically changing during the turbulent years of social criticism in the 1960s and 1970s when, influenced by emancipation movements, traditional practices and conventions were questioned. For historiography, Tollebeek showed how a neo-modern historical consciousness rejected the appropriation of history, the use of history as exemplary to create a national identity, and how history writing became an act of revenge; instead of examples to follow, it offered examples to avoid. It is not surprising that changes in historical consciousness influence mnemonic practices, including practices for children. Consequently, claiming a shift in historical fiction for children is in line with history's history. Instead of glorifying the nation and its national heroes, historical novels would emphasise the black pages of history, especially for the common man, and project new social ideas and ideals on past periods, events, and people.

However, Joosen and Vloeberghs argue how a collapse of the enlightened humanistic tradition focused on the continuation of a given social order was mostly reserved for realistic stories in contemporary settings, while historical fiction often stuck to older conventions.<sup>76</sup> This case study of Dutch historical novels for children indeed shows how the 1960s and 1970s do make a start in shaking genre conventions, but the number of books that are claimed to change the genre remains well below the number of conventional historical children's books. In terms of Erll and Rigney's cultural memory dynamics, former mediations of Dutch national history were remediated mostly to stabilise and consolidate a given image of past periods, people, and events. Critical reflection on and renewal of former mediations or representations can be found in only a small number of them.<sup>77</sup>

Fewer than half of the novels that were analysed do indeed take a critical stance towards history and only some of them explicitly condemn practices such as slavery. They emphasise the trials and tribulations of common people during turbulent times in history and criticise former representations in which only victories, heroism, and national pride ruled representations for children. However, more than half were traditional historical novels for children, in which conventional ideas reign and the stories confirm stereotypical images of Dutch history and people. Indeed, the historical novel for children can be called a conventional genre, especially those that do not excel in literary quality.<sup>78</sup> This seems to be the key to the differences between the novels in the corpus that were analysed for this research: those that were awarded prizes without exception fulfil the expectations based on the histories of children's literature. They are critical of historical practices and events, focus on the lives of common people, and project recent emancipatory ideals on historical characters. They are written by authors who were professionally engaged in children's literature. One of them was a professional historian, two grew up in Dutch colonies, eyewitnesses to the Dutch colonial past, and one was politically active in expressing a lot of social criticism. Strikingly, most of them were women. The novels that still adhere to the anti-modern and modern approach of history transmit a conventional image of the past which was introduced in periods in which nation-building and the formulation of a national character reigned. They were written by male authors, most of them practising Protestants who probably grew up with the tradition of Protestant writers presenting Dutch history from a national perspective, and who often earned their money by teaching and writing many children's books. In other words, during the 1960s and 1970s, two groups of historical novels can

<sup>76</sup>Joosen and Vloeberghs, *Uitgelezen jeugdliteratuur*.

<sup>77</sup>Erll and Rigney, "Introduction".

<sup>78</sup>Joosen and Vloeberghs, *Uitgelezen jeugdliteratuur*.

be identified when it comes to the representation of the past: a group of novels written by progressive writers that won prizes and, perhaps because of that, made it to the histories of children's literature, in which practices and representations of the past were criticised and history, history writing, and the idea of national identity were deconstructed; and a group of novels that did not win prizes and held on to the tradition of glorifying the nation, its heroes, and people. However, the image of the Dutch that the books convey does not vary accordingly. In prize-winning books, authors deployed the strategy of using protagonists as mediators. They have a prophetic view on contemporary practices and ideas, a view that corresponds to the norms and values of the time of representation, which not only makes it easy to identify with them, but also softens national guilt and makes history a story of progress that was already present in contemporary Dutchmen. Simultaneously, Dutch rulers were downgraded in this group of books, chiefly described as money-grubbers without any concern for the consequences for common people. In the group of books that did not win prizes the Dutch get ascribed characteristics that had become a constant from the birth of the genre for children onward. One author, however, did both. Thea Beckman is one of the most innovative Dutch writers of historical fiction for children in this period. She incorporated the new ideas on history and history writing in her novels by projecting emancipatory ideas on characters, criticising rulers, explicitly emphasising the faith of common people, and downgrading former history writing. At the same time, she attributed very traditional characteristics to the Dutch. This combination of innovation along the lines of current historiography and tradition made her both a prize-winning author and the most popular writer of the genre in the Netherlands.

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